

The 1990 Christmas movie, *Home Alone*, still holds the record as the highest grossing holiday movie of all time.

The plot is rather improbable. 15 members of 3 related families spend the night together to prepare for a holiday trip to Paris. Young 8-year-old Kevin McCallister manages to upset his parents, aunt, uncle, siblings, and cousins. He ruins the evening meal and is sent to spend the night in the spare room in the attic.

As his mother checks on him, she says,
"Just stay up there! I don't want to see you again for the rest of the night."

To which Kevin replies, "I don't want to see you again for the rest of my whole life. And I don't want to see anybody else either... I hope I never see any of you jerks again."

Well, there's a power outage that night—alarm clocks don't go off. The family wakes up late and there's a panicked rush to get to O'Hare and on the plane to Paris. And they discover on the plane in the mid-Atlantic, that Kevin has been left behind.

Meanwhile, Kevin wakes up in an empty house, and thinks that his wish has come true. His family has disappeared. And goes wild and celebrates his newfound "freedom" doing all sorts of things that an 8-year-old might find thrilling if they were home alone.

The bulk of the movie has two main arcs. One is Mom desperately trying to get home to her son in the midst of Holiday travel and sold out flights. The second is young Kevin trying to defend his home against a couple of burglars who are planning to rob the place. Kevin eventually sets up all sorts of child-like Rube Goldberg booby traps to stop the criminals.

And this is the most improbable part of the whole movie. While it is a comedy, these booby traps are pretty extreme. It's almost like a cartoon, with an extremely high level of potentially lethal violence. Think Wile E. Coyote versus the Roadrunner.

In fact, *Home Alone* is so violent, there are a number of articles and websites out there that calculate how many of the injuries the robbers sustain would actually be fatal. In real life—the robbers would have probably been killed many times over. So the most improbable part of the whole movie is at the end, with the robbers being carted off in a police car, instead of in a hearse.

But in the midst of all of this comedic carnage in *Home Alone*, there are two wonderful spiritual subplots. And I want to spend some time with each of them.

Young Kevin at first is delighted to be home alone. At first he thinks it is the fulfillment of his wishes.

But as reality sinks in, he realizes how important his family is to him, how much he misses them. Being home alone is not all it seemed cracked up to be. And so Kevin goes to Santa. He says he knows the guy dressed up like Santa is not the real Santa, but that he works for him. And he asks the guy to give the real Santa this message:

"Would you please tell him that instead of presents this year, I just want my family back. No toys. Nothing but (Dad, Mom,) Buzz, Megan, Linnie and Jeff. And my aunt and my cousins. And if he has time, my Uncle Frank."

Kevin has the deep realization that we sometimes forget. We are social creatures. We have been created to be in relationship with others. Human beings need human interactions. We wither without them.

Now, this isn't about whether you're married or single. I know folks that live alone who have a wealth of friendships and relationships with others. And I know folks that live with other people who are often very lonely.

And some of us are more introverted and need some time alone. But all of us need others in our lives. That's the way we have been created, as social creatures.

But we are also created as spiritual creatures. And we not only need relationships with others, we need relationship with God. And one of our greatest spiritual problems is neglecting that relationship, thinking that God is not necessary for us, that we can go it alone just fine, thank you very much.

It is a fundamental human delusion: I'm self-sufficient. I don't need others. I don't need God. And yet, we do.

And part of the good news we celebrate this season is that God goes to great lengths to seek us out, to invite us into relationship and deeper relationship with him. God goes comes to us as Emmanuel, "God with us." He is born among us and lives among us in the person of Jesus Christ. And he invites us to become part of Christ's body, a new family, with new relationships, relationship with God, relationships with each other.

In *Home Alone*, Kevin's mother goes to great lengths to get home to her son. In the same way, God goes to extraordinary lengths to seek relationship with us. We are called to be in relationship with God. And we are called to be in relationship with others.

In the Catechism in the back of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the mission of the Church is defined this way:

"The mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

We are not created to be alone.

And this is a central part of the second great spiritual subplot in *Home Alone*.

It turns out, young Kevin is not the only one home alone. They also have a neighbor, Old Man Marley. Amongst the kids in the neighborhood, there is a false rumor that Old Man Marley is an unconvicted serial killer, the "South Bend Shovel Slayer." That's not true. But Marley is a lonely old man.

He has a conversation with Kevin in a beautiful church. The outside of the church is a Methodist Church in Wilmette, IL that was just a couple miles from my seminary. But the interior scenes were filmed about 20 miles away at Grace Episcopal Church in Oak Park. If you look closely you can see *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The Hymnal 1982* in the pews.

Kevin has entered the church, drawn by the sound of a choir practicing. Old Man Marley reveals that he has come to choir practice to hear his granddaughter sing. He can't see her at other times because he is estranged from his family. He tells Kevin,

"Years back, before you and your family moved on the block, I had an argument with my son... We lost our tempers, and I said I didn't care to see him anymore. He said the same, and we haven't spoken to each other since."

Kevin who is missing his own family, commiserates with Marley about how difficult families can sometimes be, and simultaneously how important they are.

In their conversation, Marley says,

"How you feel about your family is a complicated thing... Deep down, you'll always love them. But you can forget that you love them. You can hurt them, and they can hurt you."

Toward the end of their conversation, Kevin encourages Marley to try to reconnect with his family, to make the phone call, to see if they can heal old wounds, especially at Christmas time.

And at the end of the movie, as Kevin is reunited with his family on Christmas day, he looks out the window. Apparently, Marley has called his son. Because Kevin sees Marley in his front yard, warmly greeting his son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter who have just arrived to celebrate Christmas. For both Marley and Kevin, Christmas will NOT be spent home alone.

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear John the Baptist talking to the crowd about preparing for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptizer appears in all 4 Gospels. But today we heard a part that appears only in Luke.

Luke says, "The crowds asked (John), 'What then should we do?'"

He replies, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

Then Luke says that even despised tax collectors came to be baptized. They asked John, "Teacher, what should we do?"

John answers, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." In other words, don't abuse your position by ripping people off.

And soldiers ask, "What should we do?"

And John even has an answer for them: "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

To all of these questions, "Teacher, what should we do?" John has an answer: 'Behave ethically. Treat others well. Don't abuse your power or your position.'

In other words, there are things that everyone can do to prepare for the coming of God's Messiah.

And there are things we can do as we prepare to celebrate the first coming of Jesus. And there are things we can do as we also prepare to greet him when he comes again.

If you've been feeling separated from God, this is the time to seek God more deeply through prayer, through scripture. God is always more ready to hear than we are to pray. God is always more desirous of a relationship with us than we could ever be with him.

Or maybe you've been feeling separated from someone in your life, a friend, a family member. Human relationships are messy and complicated things. But this might be the time to seek healing, or forgiveness, to make the first move. It might not work. But then again, it might. You'll never know unless you try it.

Or maybe you're good with your relationship with God and with others. But maybe there's someone in your larger orbit who is experiencing loneliness. You might try reaching out to them, sharing a bit of the love God has for you with them.

At Christmas we prepare to celebrate God's incredible love in being born in our midst. The poet, G. K. Chesterton writes,
*Men are homesick in their homes,
 And strangers under the sun*¹

What a haunting phrase that is. Homesick in our homes. And also strangers under the sun. We do experience loneliness, and alienation. That is part of our human condition. But Chesterton tells us where we may find home, our true home. He writes,
*A child in a foul stable,
 Where the beasts feed and foam;
 Only where He was homeless
 Are you and I at home*²

That's the Good News we prepare for in Advent. That's the Good News we will celebrate in 9 days at Christmas. He comes in the manger. He comes on the cross. He reconciles us to God, so that we may be truly home.

¹ G.K. Chesterton, "The House of Christmas"

² Ibid.

Chesterton concludes by telling us that God invites us,
*To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.*³

None of us has to be home alone. God is with us in Jesus Christ. Our true home is with him. Our true home is in him.

May you find and be found by him. May you experience his love. And may you share that love with others.

³ Ibid.